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Ceremony in Honor of South Dakota's First Tribal Relations Secretary J.R. LaPlante

PIERRE, SD – A traditional honor ceremony will take place on Tuesday, March 1, 2011, at 4:30 p.m. CST at Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Place in Fort Pierre to honor the new Secretary of Tribal Relations, Leroy “J.R.” LaPlante.

After assuming office as the 32nd Governor of South Dakota on Jan. 8, 2011, Dennis Daugaard created the Cabinet-level Department of Tribal Relations. It is the first department of its kind in South Dakota and will serve to re-emphasize the importance of Native American issues and foster a better working relationship among the state and the nine tribes within its borders.

J.R. LaPlante was named the first Secretary of Tribal Relations on Feb. 11, 2011. Before accepting the new position, Secretary LaPlante maintained a law practice in Vermillion, specializing in Native American Law. He also served as the chief judge and court administrator for the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe in Fort Thompson and is a former administrative officer for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Secretary LaPlante is a 2009 graduate of the University of South Dakota School of Law, with an undergraduate degree from Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn. He is a member of the first cohort of Native Nation Rebuilders selected by the Bush Foundation in 2010 and served as an Equal Justice Works, AmeriCorps Legal Fellow with South Dakota Access to Justice in 2009. His Lakota name is Tasunke Waste (His Horse is Beautiful).

Secretary LaPlante is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and his wife, Kathy LaPlante, is a member of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma. He has a 5-year-old daughter, Anisah, and an adopted son, Marvin, 24.

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About Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Place: Administered by the Wakpa Sica Historical Society, the Reconciliation Place in Fort Pierre occupies land placed in trust for 11 tribes of the Sioux Nation. A work in progress with a recently completed conference room and administrative office, this tribal gathering place will display and interpret tribal history, art and culture, house an economic development center, and the Tribal Judicial Support Center, Native American Mediation Training Center, and Sioux Nation Supreme Court. This multi-purpose facility will provide cultural, legal, and economic development services to 11 tribes throughout the Sioux Nation and beyond.

The goal of the Reconciliation Place is to forge greater understanding and cooperation among and between indigenous tribal people and non-tribal people by honoring the historical differences of perspectives between cultures.

* Tasunke Waste (Tah-SHOON'-kay WASH'-tay)